



Jim Campbell and Jane Rosen

"Coffee Stains" (2015), by Jim Campbell and Jane Rosen, combines ink, coffee and wash on a glass panel with electronics.

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

Confronting barriers posed by technology

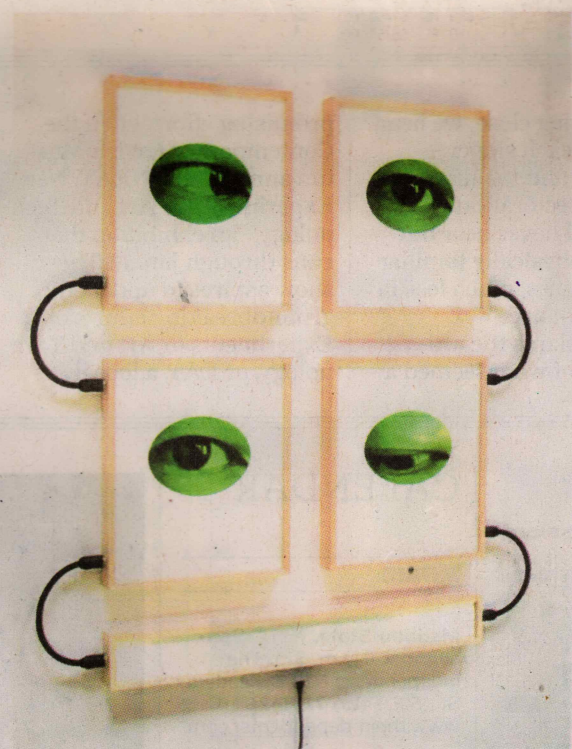
S.F., San Jose exhibitions struggle to create emotional connections

Jim Campbell's mini-survey exhibition at San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art reveals the romantic side of high-tech art. When did engineering become so tenderhearted?

Alongside Janet Cardiff's soul-stirring "The Forty Part Motet," at Fort Mason's new Gallery 308, Campbell's work prompts us to wonder whether technology, in the hands of the right artists, might reveal as much about our inner selves as it does the external world.

Campbell is a widely respected San Francisco artist whose best-known works (a short introductory video can be found at <https://youtu.be/4x48aCX1uK8>) include large light constellations presented in the trees of New York's Madison Square Park (2010-11), hung high in the atrium of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2011-12) or ribboned across the ceiling at the San Diego airport (2010-13). These glimmering installations of pulsing LEDs, visually attractive and

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Alan Rath

"Four Eyes" (2006), by Alan Rath, is on display at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in S.F.

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Art, technology a challenging pairing

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spatially immersive even at first glance, gradually resolve into images when seen from certain angles: passersby on city streets, dancers, swimmers.

Emotional yearning

His current show, a partial recap of a 2014 presentation at Hosfelt Gallery, also introduces new works made in collaboration with another artist, Jane Rosen. The whole of those objects doesn't quite add up to the sum of their parts. Rosen's abstract cast-glass plaques and her classic drawing of a horse on translucent glass are not improved by the addition of Campbell's flickering backlight, and her images, lovely on their own, only obfuscate his usual clarity. But the new pieces express a yearning for emotional content impossible to ignore.

Campbell's more accustomed practice is to parse visual information into ever smaller elements, reducing his pictures to the absolute threshold of readability. How many dots in a halftone reproduction, how many pixels on a monitor add up to a portrayal of Grandpa? Paradoxically, the more detail eliminated, the more universal the image: No longer recognizable as an individual, it comes to stand for "older gentleman," then "man" and, finally, "person."

An anonymous home movie Campbell finds on eBay is atomized, and thus expanded, into the story of all families, and then our own family. We are left with simultaneous feelings of what is lost — the individual — and a lingering essence of the intimate.

Overpowering sensation

Intimacy is the overpowering sensation produced by "The Forty Part Motet," as well. Audio speakers are arranged in a circle, controlled by sophisticated hardware to reproduce 40 singers' voices. As the work is played, each of the 40 speakers broadcasts an individual singer's voice; each black box on a metal stand is a person, with personally identifiable modulation, pronunciation and quirks. At the center of the circle, the music blends into a chorus of prayer and



Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

Gwynned Vitello listens to sound artist Janet Cardiff's "The Forty Part Motet" at the Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture.

Jim Campbell: New Work and Collaborations With Jane Rosen: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; noon-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Through Feb. 7. San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, 560 S. First St., San Jose. (408) 283-8155. www.sjica.org.

The Forty Part Motet: Noon-8 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Through Jan. 18. Free; advance tickets recommended. Gallery 308, Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture, 2 Marina Blvd., S.F. (415) 345-7575. www.fortmason.org/event/forty-part-motet.

NEAT: New Experiments in Art and Technology: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday-Tuesday; 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday. Through Jan. 17. Contemporary Jewish Museum, 736 Mission St., S.F. (415) 655-7800. www.the-cjm.org.

praise. Drawing close, we hear the frailty of each singer — slight timing and tonal errors, lips and expectorations — that we could never hear but in the most physically familiar of circumstances, much less in a live performance.

Which explains the ultimate failure of what seemed a

promising effort when the Contemporary Jewish Museum announced "NEAT: New Experiments in Art and Technology," an exhibition that runs through Jan. 17. The show aspires to update the groundbreaking efforts of Experiments in Art and Technology, or EAT, a loosely

organized membership organization that brought together artists and engineers in the 1960s and '70s for performances, exhibitions and publications.

Embracing humanity

Let's set aside the outsize ambition of the CJM project, a single show that could not possibly approximate the breadth of EAT, a long-term international effort with, at times, substantial corporate funding. That's a practical matter. More crippling is "NEAT's" embrace of gimmickry over substance, a flaw more acceptable back in the day when EAT bore witness to what it saw as the dawn of a new day.

Context is everything in a group exhibition. Even Jim

Campbell's contribution to the CJM show, a piece he successfully redesigned as a more compact work for San Jose, looks lightweight here, in an environment compromised by several installations that offer little more than one-off jokes and large, 2015 versions of lava lamps and the Etch A Sketch. The show is entertaining, and certainly could be enjoyable to younger viewers, but in the end it's somehow hollow.

Technology, in and of itself, is a sterile pursuit. Successfully partnered with art, however, it can make us more deeply feel our humanity.

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